**Holocaust.**

          Adrenaline courses through my veins like the bloodthirsty River Styx burning through the hellish gates of the Underworld, yet I am placid- oblivious to the fiery scene around me. How beautiful is this deadly, spiraling torch of crimson as it melds into the sunset! I revel in this delightful arson, this perfect crime. Pulsing heat from the embers immerse my fingertips; the intoxicating scent of smoke and moribund leaves tantalize my senses. Alas, the sharp crackling of the blaze bitterly awakens me to reality. An acrid, suffocating smell of burning rubber sears my nostrils as the combustion laps forcefully at my sneakers. In my trance, I failed to notice the rough wood bark, so tenderly guarded in my hands, turn to speckled ash. Only the velvety smooth caress of deathly gray dust remains. The cinders are so fragile, so beautiful; my coffee-tainted breath catches in the midst of the inferno. Dry gusts of heat then immediately scorch the inside of my mouth.  A cry pierces the air. It is the sound of pure, undiluted fear- the desperate fleeing cries of frantic creatures. Even pale gray wisps of serpents slither towards the sky, away from the sparks, and dissolve into nothingness. What a bête noire this conflagration must be to them! In the last, haunting notes of this spontaneous, destructive symphony, I witness the wilting death of auburn leaves as they are consumed by the inevitable- the ravenous, devouring flames.

**A Special Birthday**

It is a perfect summer night in Hawaii; there is a cool breeze – not too hot, not too cold. My eyelids are heavy, weighed down of jetlag from the time change from Japan. It is my birthday, but I am too tired to celebrate. As my mind starts drifting into the dream world, I hear a sudden outburst of a cheerful chorus of “Happy Birthday”. When finished, an explosion of applause erupts from my table, and a small cake is placed in front of me. All fatigue forgotten, I look around me, staring at the beaming faces of family and friends alike, all wearing beautiful, red flowers in their hair. I tug at the hem of my dress, nervous under the eye of so many, and blow out the ten candles neatly placed on the cake. A sudden gust of wind blows in my face, and I smell a mixture of burning candle wax and the salty ocean breeze. It is pleasant; I like it. Washing down the faint aftertaste of pineapples from dinner, I pick up the cold silverware, ready to taste my surprise birthday cake. My mother gives me the first piece, and I hastily bite into the rich chocolate cake, savoring every sweet bite.

**First Snow**

         After waking up to the vague, drifting scents of maple syrup and hot chocolate, I drag myself out of bed and shuffle my feet sleepily out of the room. Where is everyone? I hear distant jubilant shouting outside, and decide to investigate. However, opening a door is no easy feat for a three-year-old. I stretch up on my toes until my fingers reach the cold brass doorknob and I pull with the strength of a bodybuilder. The door cracks open. Immediately, my breath catches in my throat. A whip of icy air strikes my face and wraps its way around me, clutching me in its icicle fingers. The world has turned white. As far as I can see, a thick blanket of cotton has enveloped the ground. One step out the door, and I'm knee-deep, my bare toes burning. Bewildered, I reach down to scoop some into my mouth and taste the gritty frozen water. Shivering and and gasping for breath, I retreat thankfully into the house, where bacon sizzles welcomingly.

**The Face.**

My footsteps echoed as I walked up the steps, the blazing heat from the stage lights beating down on my face and the top of my head, threatening to burst into flames. I hear the rustle of people shifting in the hard, uncomfortable auditorium chairs. Someone coughs. The back doors open and blinding light floods the large room. I briefly make out faces in the audience but the light disappears before I can fully recognize anyone. I feel everyone's eyes on me as I continue walking across the stage, stumbling here and there. My heart pounds in my chest feeling as if it's about to break through my chest. The pianist gives me an encouraging smile which I feebly return. My cheeks are burning. They're turning a deep crimson. I scan the crowd looking for a face, the one face that will reassure me as I take the microphone from the stand. The face I long to see is lost in the dark sea of faces. I drop my eyes back to floor and the pianist begins playing the first few notes.





